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ARTICLE VII.

FULL FIDELITY TO GOD'S GIFTS.

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Five thousand men had been fed. Their hunger had been satisfied, and there was no present need of any more food. Yet the direction was given by Him who spread that table in the mountain wastes, "*Gather up the fragments.*" The divine power, revealed in furnishing the meal, had shown it an easy thing to command a fresh abundance for every recurring want. In overpowering miracle, transferring the mysterious process of increase from its usual manner and place in the furrows of the well-tilled field, to the very hand of the eater, the Son of God was exhibiting the overflowing fulness of His resources. Yet closing this revelation of heaven's measureless opulence, He spoke the high command, "*Gather up the fragments.*" The economy was not required by inability to furnish more. His command had its reason, not in his own necessities of economizing, but in his *disciples'* duty of full fidelity to God's gifts. It was not what was necessary for Himself, but right for them: "*Gather ye up the fragments.*" It was to be the law of *their* duty. Those fragments were products of providing love and omnipotent power. They were not to be trodden, in thoughtless inappreciation, under the feet of the well-satisfied multitude. No part of God's gift was to be treated lightly or wasted.

The particular lies in the general. The instance discloses the principle; and we regard our Saviour as here teaching a lesson of varied and far-reaching application, in the divine philosophy of life. "That nothing be lost,"

Baccalaureate Discourse, delivered in connection with the exercises of Pennsylvania College, August 9th, 1868. The Discourse is based upon the words: "*Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.*"

must be viewed as a fundamental law of the kingdom of God, in the use of all that he has bestowed. Though this kingdom is to have the overflowing abundance imaged in the miraculous provision on that mountain slope, it calls to the greatest carefulness of its resources. Down to the very smallest parts they constitute the holy elements of man's appointed stewardship.

Taking the general principle, therefore, unrestricted by the circumstances of its announcement, we desire—standing here in the place of one who, you doubtless fondly anticipated, would address you this hour, but whom the Master has called to his gracious recompense—to call your attention, my young friends, to the *Duty of full Fidelity to God's gifts*. "Gather up the fragments * * that nothing be lost." It is a general principle, and general principles, like the sunshine, are for the illumination of every day.

I. THE NATURE OF THIS DUTY

May be easily understood. It is based in the great truth, that blessings and responsibilities go together. From the first sublime gift of being, and redemption of that being, down to the smallest parts of the divine bestowments, the reception of the blessing involves the obligation to its right and faithful use. The measure of the obligation can never be less than the *whole* of the gift. God will have none of the gifts of his love and power trampled on and wasted. Waste and loss are no part of the divine method. It is not to be of man's. It might seem, from passing glance at appearances, that Jehovah is wasteful of his products, and gives to men an example of indifference to the economical care of them all. He buries in depth of wilderness and forest the treasures of his skill and power; in sweet flower and painted plumage, and all the riches of material forms, where no intelligent eye beholds, or sensitive nature is gladdened by them. He does not economize his sunlight, restricting it to place and quantity absolutely indispensable, but pours the rays in sublime superabundance through the deep gorges of uninhabitable mountains and on the already burnt sands of vast wildernesses. As He wheels the chariot of the clouds, to water the fields and gardens, He does not, in exact calculation of the needed amount, convey no more from the sea than required, but holds the heavy clouds to their work till the hills and

valleys are drenched, and ravine and brook and river are overflowing with the superabundance. Instead of restricting the great work of atonement to those who, His omniscience foresaw, would accept it, He has seemed to expend his love in vain, in having Jesus "taste of death for every man." But whilst these things disclose the divine fulness and the profusion in which His power works, it is an open proclamation of his grand principle of economy, that in them all He allows no waste. In the flowers of the desert, passing angels may read the skill and care of God, while they bloom, and every atom of the decay is saved to repeat a form of beauty. The overflowing light and heat are garnered up in God's secret, ever unfailing treasury. No drop of water from the well-drenched hills is lost, but every one preserved to give its needed help in continuing the mighty irrigation of the earth. And for the proffered gift of life through Jesus' death, He holds every soul, to whom it is made, responsible. If sin trample it down, God gathers it up, as the shining vindication of His gracious and just government. Down to the minutest parts, His abundant gifts are to be held sacred from wastefulness and destruction. They call for holy and full fidelity.

Look at the material to which economical fidelity was called in the text. It was the inferior item of bodily food. It seems to be one of the most carnal and common gifts. Annually, the broad continents of the earth, and isles of the sea, at the bidding of God, present a rich profusion. On a grander scale than the multiplication of a few loaves, He is ever producing food for the multitudes. Yet, even of fragments of bodily food to the amount of a few baskets full, the heavenly Teacher says to His students, "Gather them up." But there are higher and more sacred gifts than this. We are recipients and stewards of things too holy and valuable to be, even in part, neglected or trampled under feet. Your steps, as young men, will lead you on in a life whose very being is a divine gift, supported and crowned with other gifts. See:

1. You have, wrapped up *in you*, God's talents. Your very being is a sublime aggregation of endowments that bespeak a careful and co-extensive fidelity. You have not yet measured up to the beautiful and grand possibilities that lie in your intellectual and moral nature. You have but begun the holy evolution. You have faculties and powers given you for higher culture and ever progressive

development. You have that immortal thing, character, for right formation and harmonious elevation. In the high, symmetrical and pure culture of the faculties and forces of your being, you mirror forth the glory of God. This glory of true, regenerated, and fully unfolded manhood, is your supreme attainment as an immortal being. No man has a right to dwarf himself, or make himself less than his best and happiest possibilities, by wasteful neglect of the germinal elements of his nature. No one has a right to rob God of part of the revenue of honor and praise due from the measure of His given talents. Yet how many belittle their being, by indolence of self-culture, and wastefulness of endowments. How few ever become what they might be. Your observation will show how few men in the various callings of life, mechanical, commercial, professional, as lawyers, physicians, or ministers, ever do full justice to themselves—how few, of whom you may not say, they might make more of themselves, by a faithful, earnest, economical and persistently continued culture of the endowments and possibilities God has placed within them.

2. There are manifold *means and opportunities for the culture* of given powers, and the formation of character. The principle before us calls for fidelity, not simply to some of these, but to *all* of them. Take, for instance, time. It is God's creation and gift. Its parts are small. Its moments, however, aggregate themselves into the ages that echo with the sounds of mighty events. But it is measured out to you and me, in mingled liberality and economy—a liberality that gives full enough for duty and happiness, but an economy that furnishes none for waste. God gives few things more precious than time. Its very dust is more than gold. As enjoyed by sinful creatures, its costliness can be measured only in the value of redeeming blood. It has been bought by the agony of Christ, for human probation and preparation for heaven. Its moments come with the stamp of the Cross on them. As to its general use, you have, doubtless, already consecrated it in some plan of useful life. Its months and years are to be employed in some proper calling or profession. But in this general use there are apt to be broken parts ever falling to the ground. Their aggregate is not measured by baskets full. Your life is apt to be broken across by a thousand interruptions, cut into pieces by multitudinous

and divergent necessities, disjointed, scattered and lost by the destructive power of myriad contingencies. It is liable to enormous waste. And in view of the preciousness and worth of this precarious gift of God, I would have this monitory voice from the hills of Galilee, ever speak to your hearts the lesson of divine economy, "Gather up the fragments * * that nothing be lost."

3. There is another class of gifts, in reference to which the duty applies—*opportunities and means of usefulness*. As young men, entering the wider activities of life, you surely recognize your mission not to live unto yourselves. A useful life is an honor and glory. It is the life of the Son of God—of every son of God. You are called, especially as men whose education and profession will lift you in the eye of the public, to no ordinary fidelity to your privileges of usefulness. It is not enough, when men do *some* good, use their principal means and larger chances. Life is mostly made up of less marked opportunities, and quiet occasions, in which a kind word, unostentatious deed, or humble service, works the blessing. Sometimes the chance to achieve good is in the calm exhibition of the sweet and heavenly passive virtues. To bear a burden meekly may make others strong, and lift them up to joy. In the offices of affection and kindness at home, in the incessant intercourse of social life, in the exhibition of spotless example in the midst of business, in regular work and self-sacrifice in the interest of the Church, in activities running down into all the ways and all the hours of daily life, and repeating themselves through all its years—in these common things, most of life's opportunities of blessing are found. The fragments are more than the loaves. He who gathers them not up, must waste the most that God sends him. "That nothing be lost," demands fidelity to all. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

Thus the principle, revealed in this command of Jesus, branches out, and touches your constant life. No further instance of its application, is needed to explain it. It is Heaven's great law of economy in your use, enjoyment, care, and administration, of the endowments and blessings, and opportunities of life. You may, indeed, live, and tread an easy way to the grave, without this careful fidelity. But that is not the highest style of life, or Christian manhood. There is something better and nobler for you.

And we wish you to hear the voice of Heaven—and so to hear, that the voice may never cease to vibrate on your ear and in your heart—calling you to improve all that you are, and all that is given you, down to the perpetual minutiae, in whose saving or waste the opulence or poverty of life is realized; to gather up every fragment that falls from the larger use and enjoyment, and to work it up into the wealth of that life-accumulation which, as “usury,” your stewardship on earth is, at last, to present before God. Such is the duty: turn your attention,

II. TO A FEW OF THE CONSIDERATIONS THAT ENFORCE IT.

The proof of duty is often in itself. It reveals itself to the soul as divine. It makes answer for itself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But it often has the King's signet in its fruits. So here. Its blessings diadem it for your obedience.

1. *The first commanding fact in this duty, is that it is the way of right and full development of character.* Character may be regarded as man's highest good. It has, indeed, been said that *happiness* is his being's “end and aim.” But this is doubtful ethics. There is that which is greater and higher than happiness. It exalts one to more essential kindredship with God. Happiness will *flow out of it*, as a stream comes out of the fountain, or attends it, as the light attends the path of the daily sun. The sun shines—right character is happy; but the nobler and better thing is that which is the substantial cause of the other. We may safely say, that, while happiness is not the end of this life, *character is*. For its recovery from the disordering, debasing, misery-producing power of sin, and its restoration to integrity, purity, and moral excellence, the economy of grace has been put in progress, and the world stands under redemptive and mediatorial government. For this the Son of God died, and all the remedial and regenerating forces of Christianity have been organized and put into working efficiency. We sometimes speak of the glory of good *deeds*. They have in them the beauty of excellence, and each one may shine as a little candle, throwing its beams far in this dark world; but the good deed is inferior to the character which is the perpetual potency of excellent activity. The very diadem of human life on earth, is character, and it is the greatest, grandest and most productive thing, that a man can attain from the spoils of

time and carry with him into eternity. As young men, you have no work more important to do for yourselves, none, perhaps, for the glory of God and the good of men, than the right formation and development of your character, the shaping of your essential being, and moulding it into a form of beauty that will be a joy and a blessing forever.

It must be evident to you all, that the very *spirit* of universal and comprehensive duty, is fundamental in right character. A consent to be unfaithful to some parts of duty, is an unfaithful spirit; and cannot be the central life about which character will form in integrity and beauty. It forms around a rot. It is a spirit of sin at its very heart. The kingdom of heaven within you, can allow no such spirit of rebellion—Milton's Satan-led force that is to be cast over the battlements. It is, indeed, the very principle of all disobedience, and treason to the divine government, to undertake to choose the *extent to which* you will obey, or hold the things of God subject to the rule of fidelity. Thus, the spirit of universal fidelity is essential to right character—is the necessary central life to aggregate character about itself.

So, the *practice* of this fidelity is necessary. The gifts of God are not only elements of responsibility, but means of spiritual culture and development. Character needs them,—needs the economical use of them all. The human soul has blessed possibilities in it beyond the power of all of them fully to unfold. The most careful husbandry of the means will still leave things before you, to which noble aspiration may, like an eager Paul, still press forward. The fragments that you waste, and the portions that you lose, are so much reduction from your true and possible measure of attainment. In a world where there are so many temptations to neglect privileges and advantages, the robbery of your character may become sadly blighting.

The best excellence of character, you know, includes harmony and symmetry. It requires the disappearance of narrowness and obliquities under breadth and fulness of culture. The more fundamental and prominent virtues are not enough. A man may have righteousness, truth, and stern integrity, and yet no loveliness or attractiveness of character. The finer and more finished features, the

gentler and more ornamental graces, all the well blended and harmonious traits of heavenly temper, spirit and conduct, must be attained, that the true *beauty* of the Lord may be seen upon you. The sculptor does not reach the true excellence of his work in the first essential shaping of his marble, chipping it down into its boldest forms, but in the delicate touches and polish of the more economical labor. The painter makes a thing of beauty and perfection, not only in the well drawn outline, but especially in the full and faultless finish of every feature and shade and expression. Such must be the true and right shaping and shading of your spiritual being—the sculpture of your immortal character. Its perfection requires that economy of divine gifts and means and blessings, in which nothing shall be lost. To secure for it not only solid integrity, but symmetry and polish, completeness and finish, all must be used with unwasting carefulness.

Young men, you have done a great and blessed thing in pressing your general character into the mould of Christian excellence. Let us call you now, with God's call, to unfold it into the highest symmetry and completeness. As God's husbandry, let no part of the field of your life lie waste. Bring it all under sedulous cultivation. And with your efforts join your prayers to God, that He would "perfect that which concerneth you."

2. *A second enforcing consideration—this is the way of useful power.* To all men, power is an attraction. Their nature goes out after it. They grasp at the centres from which it is wielded. To come into the duty of the text, is to come into the highest method of moral power. This is apparent in several ways:

For instance, as partial fidelity is itself a sin, it eats away strength. Whilst holiness is moral health and vigor, the least sin is a breaking down into weakness. It withers the bloom and nerve of character, and dries up its divine force. Every fault or blemish, not removed by perfecting grace, is an enfeebling of power. Perpetually recurring unfaithfulness, in wasting the elements of self-development, must eat daily away your power of usefulness,—a power, of which we are sure the Divine Teacher is forever repeating to you the admonition, "Gather up the fragments * * that nothing be lost."

Again, these separate fragments of the materials of this duty, *hold* the power. The atoms embody the aggregate

strength. We may look on Jesus as here calling attention to *God's* grand method of power, and giving an intimation how we may find our own. How does God move into the exercise of power? He secures the aggregate by attention to the parts. He warms the world by gathering up all the broken and scattered sun-rays, and waters the hills with collected mist-particles. The mighty power of gravitation He ties, not to sublime masses, but to each of the atoms. He gathers power enough to hold mountains to their bases, planets in their orbits, and systems in their place, by collecting, without waste, the attraction in every particle. If we thus ascend

"The great world's altar stairs
That slope through darkness up to God,"

we discern how He accumulates the power that is so omnipresent and resistless in nature. And it is a divine hint to men, an example for us. Our true moral power is that from which the baskets full of fragments have not been lost. It is by faithfulness in that which is least, that we reach fidelity and might in much.

God, by His example, has ever been teaching this lesson, how to be efficient in doing good. In His Son, when on earth, though engaged in the great scheme of redemption, He uses every portion of the passing days, without wasting any opportunities. That was his way of wielding great power to bless. And all through nature, in God's attention to minuteness of parts and completeness of details, shines the efficiency of His working. In His infinite plans He allows no part to drop out or be lost. While swinging stars into space, and ordering the goings of great systems, He seems to work with as much care in constructing the eye of the insect that sports in the breeze of the morning. Whilst He paints the drapery of the setting sun, he colors the petals of our garden flowers, and hears the prayer of the little child. It is thus that God blesses so many—blesses them always—blesses them so much. In this economy of the minutæ is his power to bless. So it must be *yours*. You will never do much, unless you economize the time, talents, opportunities, chances, resources and energies with which God supplies you, unless you hold the details of your life-work in close and faithful and compact harmony with its general plan,—un-

less you gather up those fragments, whose aggregate, as with the twelve, becomes so astonishingly great.

Allow an instance or two, in a single thing. Albert Barnes informs us, that it was in the gathered fragments of time, broken in the morning from unnecessary sleep, that he wrote his practical Notes on the New Testament. They have gone into tens of thousands of hands, in thousands of Sunday Schools, entering the minds and the hearts of the young in this land and across the seas, and probably *will*, for generations to come. What power for good he got in this way—farther-reaching, perhaps, than all the rest of his efforts. Oh, if the time, and strength and opportunities now wasted—fallen like broken fragments from the loaves—by Christians, were all faithfully husbanded and given to God in earnest duty, would not the Church be mightier and the world better?

Another: Masson, in his "Recent British Philosophy," says: "All our British speculative thought, in every corner where intellect is still receptive and free, has been effected, at least posthumously, by the influence of that massive man of the bold look and clear hazel eye, whose library lamp might have been seen nightly, a few years ago, by late stragglers, in one of the streets in Edinburg, burning far into the night, when the rest of the city was asleep." Economizing that and other gifts of God, has placed Sir William Hamilton among the thrones of power in the metaphysical world.

3. *A final plea for this duty, to engage yet a brief attention, is that it is the way of happiness.* It is so, because it is duty. For, every duty done, turns into a song, and gladdens like a victory. And more—it forms the character whose fruit is blessedness. The best character will, in the end, bear the most of it. It is the fruit of *grace* in you, but it is fruit that will be forever sweet to your tastes. It is not circumstances or surroundings that are going to make you happy. The conditions of happiness must be within you; and other things being equal, the fountain will be pure and full in proportion to the moral and spiritual excellence that you reach. Heaven is happy—so is the way there. It is a path of pleasantness and peace. Sin works the beginnings of retribution and sorrow in this life—monitory of that woe when the sinner shall be *filled* with his own ways, and eat the fruit of his devices. So every unfaithfulness to duty, every trampling on God's

gifts, becomes not only an imperfection in character, but an abatement from happy consciousness of right, a spot of painfulness and self-condemnation. If piety is happiness, the best and most faithful piety, must be the happiest. And in heaven, the Scriptures are clear, the most faithful life will be crowned with the brightest recompence and joy. Among the "wise," and those that "shine in the firmament," one star differs from another star in glory. Rulership over ten cities will be the crown of faithful administration of our Lord's talents. Through the blessings of this life, you thus lay up "treasure in heaven."

Now, we desire for you, young men, as you go forth from College, the very best, most substantial, symmetrical and full development of character, a career of the highest, broadest and most beneficent power among men, and the surest, truest, and most unfailing happiness. This *character*, formed in the spirit and practice of the most comprehensive, and all-pervading fidelity, will be the nearest possible approximation to the apostolic standard, "perfect and entire, wanting nothing," a character that God approves and angels admire. This *power*, for more of which the needy earth is sighing, is worthy of your holiest ambition. And the *happiness* is that pure, refreshing, strengthening, unalloyed happiness, whose full, clear flow, passing beyond life, will mingle with the eternal streams that make glad the city of God. Could we desire for you anything better? Could we call you to anything worthier? We want not your life to be lost, out of Christ, so that you would have to feel and say at the end, "We have lived in vain and run in vain." And we want not any of the opulence of your blessings in Christ, to be wasted, so as to diminish your character, usefulness and happiness here, and leave your crown without stars in heaven. Oh may you have, first of all, Christ, and then, in Him, all the *FULNESS* of the blessings of God, nothing rejected, nothing wasted, nothing lost. "Gather up the fragments." And when you reach the end of your days, the light of Heaven's approval will stream down through the evening shadows on you; and passing up from such a life, you will be met with the gracious welcome, "Well done, good and faithful servant." "The joy of the Lord" will be yours.

